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AUTHOR Broudy, Harry S.
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ABSTRACT

A theory of vocational education would be a set of reasoned beliefs about the goals, policies, organization, curriculum, and methods of teaching and learning for a program designed to produce occupational competence. The well-worked-out theory would provide a consistent set of guiding principles that might result in a consistent policy for action. Need for a theory of vocational education depends on how much its policy requires the clarification of basic arguments for vocational education. Vocational education must be justified, and this can be accomplished by having vocational educators who explore the possibilities of rationalizing, standardizing, depersonalizing, and intellectualizing vocational occupations. A model for a theory of vocational education is virtually synonymous with a curriculum for the preparation of teachers and other professional workers in the field. The model includes two major sections: the foundational studies presumably to be required of all and the specialty. (YLB)

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Occasional Paper No. 73

TOWARD A THEORY OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

by

Dr. Harry S. Broudy
Professor Emeritus, Philosophy of Education
University of Illinois
Champaign-Urbana Campus

The National Center for Research in Vocational Education
The Ohio State University
1960 Kenny Road
Columbus, Ohio 43210

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FOREWORD

The development of a theory and philosophy is a painstaking procedure for a discipline to undertake. The advice and counsel of a noted philosopher is essential to determine what is believed to be true about vocational education. The National Center is very fortunate to have Dr. Harry J. Broudy, Professor Emeritus, Philosophy of Education, from the University of Illinois to assist the profession in understanding why a philosophy might be desired and how to go about formulating one.

Dr. Broudy was a student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and received a master's degree from Boston University and a doctorate from Harvard. He has served as a distinguished lecturer at Kent State University and as the Boyd H. Bode Lecturer at The Ohio State University. He was a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences. He has authored several books including one entitled *Building a Philosophy of Education.*

On behalf of the National Center for Research in Vocational Education and The Ohio State University, it is indeed a pleasure to share with you this presentation by Dr. Harry S. Broudy entitled, "Toward a Theory of Vocational Education."

Robert E. Taylor
Executive Director
The National Center for Research
in Vocational Education

TOWARD A THEORY OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

What Is A Philosophy of Vocational Education?

A number of years ago when I was asked to do some work in the area of the philosophy of vocational education, the inquiry I made of the person requesting the work was, "Do you need a philosophy of vocational education?" The person responded with, "What do you mean, do you need one? Every educational program needs a philosophy." This notion comes, of course, from the foundations departments in colleges of education.

I went on to say that vocational education is perhaps the only type of education that in recent times has been successful. Vocational educators know what they are doing; they have a market; they have a product; they can demonstrate it. Few other educators can say as much. Some school people tend to substitute philosophy for competence, but vocational educators do not have to—they know what they are doing. They have confidence in their programs, and every other educational field envies them. They also envy the way vocational programs receive operating funds. So why would vocational educators want to burden themselves with the excess intellectual baggage of a philosophy? I would suggest, in all seriousness, that you consider whether you need one. If, however, the answer to that question is yes, my discussion on how to arrive at a philosophy of vocational education may serve as a guide to formulating one.

A complete theory of vocational education would be a set of *reasoned* beliefs about the goals, policies, organization, curriculum, and methods of teaching and learning for a program designed to produce occupational competence. These beliefs range from specific course outcomes to hypotheses about the role of work and how it fits into the social order and into the life of individuals. Such a theory would be capped at the highest level of generality by beliefs about the nature of knowledge, goodness, and beauty, which could be used to justify subordinate beliefs but would not themselves be justified by any higher theory. If justified at all, it would be by the lives of those who espoused these values.[1]

Such a set of beliefs and their justification are sometimes called "a philosophy." However, it may be less confusing to say that it is a theory of which the most general beliefs come from the standard branches of philosophy: epistemology, ethics, metaphysics, and aesthetics. The difference is important because in most educational controversies, much of the evidence for conflicting beliefs comes from empirical data and generalizations. There is no point in raising philosophical issues if the controversy can be settled by facts or empirical theories about the facts. Sometimes the issue is out-and-out political or simply a practical question of space, personnel, or funding. The philosophical issue is raised when fact, common sense, experience, prudence, and ingenuity fail to solve problems or resolve controversies—when the criteria of truth and goodness are themselves in question.

For example, if one argues that vocational training will increase income, the evidence is to be sought in surveys. If one wishes to defend a project method of teaching vocational education as compared to a lecture-laboratory approach, the evidence should come from studies on learning and learning theory. However, when life *outcomes* are up for justification, there may be no clear answers

either in science or in fact. One may have to turn to philosophical theories of human nature and happiness, to theories about what *ought* to be. For example, the Puritan work ethic cannot be justified by empirical studies alone, for it is a hypothesis grounded in certain ideals of character and religious principles, and these may not be amenable to empirical validation.

The claims of career education have come under attack recently because certain assertions of theories about society and the role of work have been challenged.[2] Some of the arguments come from empirical studies; others from ideologies about the virtues and deficiencies of a capitalistic society. Each side accuses the other of inadequate scholarship, a disrespect for the facts, and naiveté. The controversy illustrates the scope of knowledge required of those who have a mind to engage in philosophical debate regarding vocational education. An adequate theory or philosophy of vocational education contains both factual and scientific propositions relevant to its problems and the philosophical propositions by which all other problems are assessed.

Theory vs. Policy

A well-worked-out theory would provide vocational education with a consistent set of guiding principles; and this, in turn, might result in a consistent policy for action. However, there can be many well-worked-out theories consistent within themselves but in conflict with each other. For example, on the one hand, it is quite possible to work out consistent theories of education based on a fundamental belief in the existence of an intellectual and moral elite. On the other hand, other educational theories could be based on egalitarianism. There is really no way of fully reconciling these theories; their dissonance has perdured despite all efforts to harmonize them within the ideology of democracy. Yet, a policy that does not combine them in some fashion would be in trouble.

Similarly, there is little hope of reconciling some Marxist views on the nature of knowledge and the role of education with an idealistic theory of knowledge. Marxist views state that the nature and test of science are formed in the field and factory; the idealistic theory assigns them to a logical structure that is independent of, although relevant to, the practical problems out of which the theory is born. The former is based on the assumption that the questions, "what is good chemistry" and "what is chemistry good for" are identical; the latter argues that there can be a political decision on the uses of chemistry, but not on its nature and structure.

Policy, to be effective in securing funds, power, and influence for vocational education, has to be expedient, eclectic, compromising, and sensible. Good policy settles for the best the situation can yield, and this means that principles may have to be ignored or suspended. However, expediency, flexibility, and suspension of principle are precisely what a highly consistent theory or philosophical system ordinarily will severely limit. For example, in the history of the vocational education movement, there always has been pressure to compromise between technical training and general studies, the first being used for an occupation, the second for citizenship.

These ad hoc compromises have prevented the exploration of how general studies do, in fact, function in life and in work, with the result that the mixture never quite produces the quality of workmanship or citizenship that we would like. Here is an instance of compromise *not* yielding good policy, and one in which tougher adherence to the distinction between the various uses of knowledge and schooling would eventuate in a better policy.[3] How badly vocational education needs or wants a well-worked-out theory depends on how much its policy requires the clarification of its basic arguments.

Some Needed Clarifications

Perhaps the way in which a theory or philosophy of education functions can be illustrated by examining some of the arguments that have been advanced for vocational/occupational education. Its advocates have presented the following arguments:

1. Because the economic life of the social order is important, everyone ought to be trained in the schools for economic productivity. This is regarded as especially important for disadvantaged youth.

2. Failure in one's economic role causes or contributes to delinquency; hence, vocational training in the schools is justified on sociological as well as economic grounds.

3. The social order, by affixing prestige and material rewards to certain occupations, prevents or discourages young people from choosing vocations realistically; hence, a massive program of vocational and personal counseling is justified.

4. The schools, by their traditional allegiance to a literary, academic, bookish curriculum, have not given the proper attention to vocational training. Hence, there should be a change, especially in the direction of secondary school vocational training for the academically limited pupil.[4]

Let us consider some of the confusions that result when these contentions are not clearly distinguished. The economic life of the Eskimo, we can assume, is important to the Eskimo, and if the Eskimos did not teach the young the vocational skills of the tribe, there would soon be no Eskimos. This is a truism. The important point is that the necessary occupational training can be accomplished by imitation and apprenticeship. No one had to urge the Eskimos to undertake this type of education. It was part of the milieu in which the young grew up. Everyone learned about the same occupational roles, although midwives and medicine men might be exceptions. The tasks comprising a given occupational role were familiar, and the proper procedures could easily be demonstrated.

In these circumstances, the know-how needed for the economic well-being of the group could be acquired and perfected without the benefit of formal occupational schooling. The moral of this example is that the importance of economic activity does not of itself imply an argument for vocational schools, programs, or curricula any more than the importance of breathing and exercise necessarily justifies schools of physical education.

If these distinctions seem trivial, then call to mind how often advocates of vocational schooling have rested their arguments on the importance of the economic functions of the social order and then prescribed the kind of training resembling that which the Eskimos have been giving informally for centuries. Contrariwise, when the American school system is charged with neglecting vocational education, it is often forgotten that at the higher education level, such schooling is not neglected at all. Those making such charges have in mind, one must suppose, a type of vocational training that is not professional, but which nevertheless cannot be acquired merely by living in the social order.

Nor is it helpful to confuse the need for more facilities for vocational schooling with the failure of young people to take advantage of existing opportunities. Surely, these are different situations. In the first situation one is saying that James and Susan wish to become electronic technicians but that, regrettably, they can find no course or school in which to carry on the requisite studies. In the second situation, one may be scolding Peter and Mary for electing a college preparatory course in high school, when their abilities and station in life (as determined by scientific prognosis) point to the advisability of a business course. The answers to the problems of James and Susan lie within the

educational wisdom and will of the community, but what is one to do with the alleged wrong-headedness of Peter and Mary?

For these reasons, the strategy of justifying vocational education is not as simple as it seems, and it may be profitable to specify the conditions that warrange new or improved programs of vocational schooling.

1. One must show that the proposed training requires formal instruction. The need for apprenticeship training not rooted in theory nor requiring theory for adequate performance is not an argument for vocational schooling.[5] It is, rather, a plea to the U.S. Department of Labor to make suitable arrangements with industry and labor unions for apprenticeship opportunities.

2. It is necessary to show that the economy clearly and insistently demands certain categories of formal vocational training, that facilities are lacking to meet this demand, or that they are rendered unavailable by high costs or unfortunate locations. For example, on the one hand, our economy seems to demand personnel trained at a sophisticated technical level, but in some localities, facilities for such training are scarce or nonexistent. On the other hand, certain vocational training facilities may be in excess of the needs of the economy.

3. One might show that certain occupations could be made more attractive by formal schooling. We have as yet done little to upgrade many of the service occupations, for which there is adequate economic demand but which are now too low on the social scale to attract workers.

The first two issues, it would seem, could be settled by empirical data. The third involves not only economic facts, but also sociopsychological and even philosophical understandings. Consider, for example, the relationship between the desirability of a vocation and its formalization and intellectualization. I am not referring to the euphemisms by which grave diggers evolved into undertakers and subsequently into morticians, and by which janitors are transmuted into custodial engineers. More fundamental are the mechanisms by which an unpleasant but socially important task is made tolerable and honorable. Nursing, cleaning, disposal of the dead, disposal of refuse, household services, and many other personal services fall into this category. There is a constant, high demand for such services, but they are unpleasant and tend to fall low on the social scale. They are not all equally low, however. Nursing is a prime example of a calling that has risen on the social scale through increased requirements for formal schooling.

There is no task so distasteful that routine, skill, and a uniform cannot make tolerable. The individual who sweeps dung out of the stable is low on the social scale; the technician who examines feces in the laboratory is not. Skill, knowledge, and standardized procedures justified by knowledge, together with a uniform and organization, help to separate the unpleasantness of the task from the character of the performer, or, to put it inelegantly, prevent it from rubbing off on the performer.

For example, it is important that the performer of a personal service not be stigmatized as a body servant owing personal fealty to a master. Contrary to the common impression, depersonalization—not personalization—is the key to vocational respectability. The loyalty of the professional worker must be to the task, not to the person served. Even when an agency or firm boasts of providing personalized service, the personalization is so managed and routinized that it is depersonalized. The gracious flight attendant is about as good an example as comes to mind. Any male traveler who construes a female attendant's interest in him as personal is soon disillusioned. This may deflate the ego of the customer, but it does wonders for the ego of the worker.

Thus, although vocational educators cannot, by elevated rhetoric, raise the social status of housework, practical nursing, gardening, and the like, they can, by giving some thought to the question, explore the possibilities of rationalizing, standardizing, depersonalizing, and, insofar as possible, intellectualizing these occupations. I take it that such study is properly within the province of graduate students and research workers in vocational education.

A good test case for a foundational analysis of educational policy is the predicament of the elderly. What sort of education can forestall the emptiness of old age? The world of work tends to cast aside the elderly; their limited knowledge of anything other than their work leaves them vegetating in the sun if they can pay the cost of their basic needs, and rotting in misery if they cannot. Their future is short in years, but their days are long; and if their health is poor, the nights are endless. What design of vocational education will give a decent promise that the intellectual, aesthetic, social, and moral resources of workers will flower when gainful employment is ended? One thing is certain: a combination of skill training and a smattering of general studies in high school will not guarantee this. Are we ready to train vocational educators to provide a kind of general education that might offer better prospects to the elderly?

A more balanced assessment of educational reform proposals might accrue from a well-developed theory of education in general and of vocational education in particular. Many educational reforms of the last decade have foundered because their advocates ignored the social reality in which schools must operate, and reformers have so distorted the traditional role of the school that failure of the innovations was virtually guaranteed. Performance contracting, vouchers, decentralization, moral education, and other funded projects ignored what a reasoned theory of schooling could have foreseen. As a result, schools, along with other institutions, have lost much of their credibility. About all the public believes is that any well-funded project will provide jobs for the reformers.

There is no lack of models or theories of vocational education. On the contrary, their abundance is evidence of the lack of either craft or theory consensus in the field. Any suggested model should—

1. be organized around educational problems;
2. be amenable to systematic development;
3. yield materials, in the form of selected topics and literature, out of which a wide variety of courses, seminars, and the like can be constructed.

A Model of the Preparation of Vocational Educators

A model for a theory of vocational education is virtually synonymous with a curriculum for the preparation of teachers and other professional workers (administrators, supervisors, and researchers) in the field. The model includes two major sections: the foundational studies presumably to be required of all, and the specialty. Under the foundational studies we have the following matrix:

FIGURE 1
DIVISIONS OF FOUNDATIONAL STUDY

Problems of	*Historical*	*Socioeconomic*	*Psychological*	*Philosophical*
Objectives				
Curriculum				
Organization				
Teaching/ Learning				
Research				

The dimensions of the study of the specialty are as follows:

Cognate content – Subject matter studied because it is related to the field in question, although it is not used directly in teaching or practice, e.g., demography or urban studies

Orientation to specialty – Familiarization with history of the specialty, current working conditions, professional organizations, leading journals, and community study

Technical skills – To be mastered and taught

Teaching skills/strategies – Laboratory, observation, practice

Internship – With supervision and opportunities for discussion of teaching and other professional problems

I shall not presume to advise vocational educators on the study of the specialty, although it might be wise for the professional organizations in this field to recommend the content within these rubrics, so that something like a consensus on topics could become at least a thinkable possibility. Looking at the design for the foundations, the following may be noted:

1. It is problem centered, a feature that distinguishes it from disciplinary studies, which are organized around key concepts and relationships.
2. Some of the foundational dimensions are empirical or quasi-empirical. Some of the materials within the socioeconomic dimensions come from the social sciences but some may come from political science, which is not always scientific in the ordinary meaning of the term. Likewise, although the psychological dimensions are commonly thought of as empirical, it is difficult not to cross the line into philosophical theories of mind and knowledge, which often are not empirical.
3. Within the philosophical dimension can be included relevant materials from epistemology, metaphysics, value theory, logic, and ethics, as well as social and moral philosophy.
4. The divisions indicated in the design do not mark off separate *courses*. How the material is to be organized for instruction is susceptible to a number of approaches, although the topics to be covered could remain constant.

While this matrix is fairly simple in design, the work of filling the cells is not easy. It requires not only a scanning of a wide range of materials, but also some kind of jury judgment as to quality and appropriateness for instruction at different levels. It does not prescribe a common course for every school or program, but it does serve as an inventory of problems that should be addressed and topics and literature that have been judged suitable for dealing with them. It would have a legitimate authority, having been prepared by scholars in collaboration with vocational educators' professional organizations.

Structural unity is possible, though ideological unity is not, even if it were desirable. Paradigm problems, standard literatures, and topics define the field of a professional study. Agreement on the paradigms is more important than on the content. Creative innovation occurs at the frontiers of the

field when a new discovery changes the paradigms themselves; but, as a rule, the great innovators go through and beyond the standard problems and not around them. As Thomas Kuhn noted in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,*[6] the paradigms that deal with standard problems of a field and the standard methodologies of inquiry into them are the paths by which students are inducted into the professional guild.

For illustration, suppose we carry one problem through the matrix. Let us say that we are inquiring into the definition of objectives for vocational education. What can one say about the historical roles of work in the economy of life? What is the key literature that might be studied at the undergraduate, graduate, or inservice levels? For example, how did the English poor laws affect the development of vocational education?

In the second row, we ask about the roles of work in the social and economic system. Does social status depend on birth, caste, or is there a system of meritocracy? How do various types of work rate in prestige and power? What has happened to the distribution of economic power as a result of collective bargaining? What is the relationship of formal schooling and the credentialing system to economic success? What effect will the feminist movement have on work patterns? In this row, the fact that economists have been studying formal schooling as an investment can be examined. The social aspects of work have been receiving a great deal of attention from sociologists and anthropologists, as well as from political scientists, so the problem is that of selection among resources, rather than a scarcity of them.

In the psychological row, the wealth of writing and discussion of the personal satisfactions and dissatisfactions of work can be considered. The problems of the assembly line, the drudgery of routinized work, the participation of workers in corporate decision making, the return of the craftsperson, and the aesthetics of machine industry are all relevant topics. The relationship of work to leisure and self-image is receiving increasing attention. The list of topics is long, and the volume of available materials large. It will take careful study of materials to construct a curriculum that covers the topics adequately and yet economically.

The philosophical dimensions of work have been prominent in the discussions of the Puritan ethic in the sixties, as have the changes in the attitudes of the young toward steady employment in the last few years. Perhaps the most systematic way of exploring this dimension is to ask about the role of work (gainful employment) in the various value domains; the role of work in the economic domain is familiar, but there is also the relation of work to health, recreation, civic obligations, and the various affectional associations (the satisfactions of being with the work gang on and off the job). Questions to ask here might be to what extent does the job develop or stunt intellectual growth, moral sensitivity, aesthetic satisfaction, and religious commitment and practice?

In our culture, work is likely to be everything or nothing. For some, it organizes all the other values; friends, recreation, reading, and political views all revolve around the job. But for others, work is so routinized and so unsatisfying that it figures in none save the economic domain of values. A lifestyle can be defined by the kinds of values that dominate and subordinate all the others, and work is a potent factor in determining the pattern that these values will take. How the various value domains are organized so that the individual actualizes them optimally is what is meant by the art of life or, if you like, the quality of life. When the diverse values reinforce and facilitate each other, the quality of life is high, intense, rewarding, and highly individual. When the value domains conflict or when they are attended to at random, there is the loss of energy and efficiency. In addition, life loses its direction and tension and, along with these, its significance and interest. In these dynamics of value, the role of work is always significant, positively or negatively.[7]

In similar fashion, the problems of curriculum organization and methods of teaching can be studied in their historical, socioeconomic, psychological, and philosophical dimensions. Stabilizing the field even this much will help to clarify the problems and directions of vocational education if, as I believe, the confusions and conflict within the field are occasioned more by disagreements on context rather than in technics. To put it differently, our disagreements in education are largely in the way we construe the social reality and what it demands of our pupils and citizens in a highly complex, interdependent, and technologically sophisticated world. Vocational educators, and perhaps all citizens, can no longer understand this social reality without deliberate, formal study; the television news is not enough. Nor is it safe to rely on the endless propaganda emanating from the vested interests of the right and left.

Vocational education does need a theory/philosophy, but I hope that I have persuaded you that such a philosophy is much more than a credo of principles arrived at in annual conventions. On the contrary, it is a field of studies that takes effort to structure and even more to master. What can be decided in conferences and conventions is whether the effort is worth the trouble.

Notes

1. For the most part I shall use vocational and occupational education as interchangeable terms and not in the special meaning of the Smith-Hughes Act.

2. Eleanor Farrar McGowan and David K. Cohen, " 'Career Education'—Reforming School Through Work." *The Public Interest* (Winter 1977). Cf. also W. Norton Grubb and Marvin Lazerson, "Rally Round the Workplace: Continuities and Fallacies in Career Education." *Harvard Educational Review* vol. 45, no. 4 (November 1975): pp. 451-474.

3. For a more detailed analysis of the uses of schooling, see H. S. Broudy, Joe R. Burnett, and B. O. Smith, *Democracy and Excellence in American Secondary Education* (New York: Rand-McNally, 1964).

4. The Carnegie Council Series. *Giving Youth a Better Chance* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1979). This document lists "major" concerns with vocational education, ranging from reducing absenteeism in high school to improving paths into military service.

5. Whether apprenticeship training is needed is another matter; and it is significant that even in England, a stronghold of apprenticeship, the Anglo-American Committee on Productivity recently recommended (without success) the shortening of apprenticeship from seven years to nine months, and the increase of fundamental education.

6. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962).

7. A detailed analysis of the several value domains and their interrelations can be found in H. S. Broudy, *Building A Philosophy of Education* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1954, 1971) and Reprint Edition (Malabar, FL: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Co., 1977).

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